REVIEWS OF NEW FICTION

Walt Whitman Hero of a Novel

THE ANSWERER: A Novel from the Life of Walt Whitman. By Grant Overton. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

THIS book shows Whitman growing like a tree out of American soil. He is in a way the whole story, yet the rest of his time is there with him.

The novel ought to be in all the nineteenth century literature and history courses of schools, colleges and reading clubs. But that fact takes away nothing from its appeal to the individual Whitmanite. Naturally the presentation of the central figure gives the narrative at times a character uncommon in fiction. Yet how many stories with nothing but plot to commend them can offer pages so thrilling as those in which Walt faces the husband of the woman he loves in New Orleans? The man is a trained duellist. And he has a gang with him to finish any job that proves too hard for him. Walt is unarmed. But this is the way he answers Raoul's threat:

"Kill me? Doubtless you think so! At a proper time, eh? Why, what time could be more proper than the present? Go—or come—right ahead. Here I am; here I have been now for several convenient moments. If I am a little difficult, why, there is your gang downstairs. After you have killed me you can finish killing *him*" —motioning toward O'Donoju. "You can then kill your wife; you can kill the doctor when he comes. One by one, or a dozen at a time, you can kill any others. Kill? You damned fool! What can *you* kill? One man against the world! Why, if I threw you down the staircase to that pack of vermin they'd tear you limb from limb; you've taught them to kill! Shucks! Get out!"

It is like the crack of a whip in a cage of lions.

Yet as achievements of the creative imagination there are finer things. The letter of Margaret Fuller telling of her experience in Rome is so essentially true to character that no doubt many readers will try to find it in her biographies. It isn't there, but it might have been.

Of course much of the very language of this book is taken from Whitman's own writings or from Traubel's report of their conversations. But so beautifully is the whole recreated that only by reference to originals could one tell the authority. But whatever the source, it all leads the reader closer to Whitman, poet and human being. Here is his analysis of his own development, in answer to a question:

"Why ask me that? Do you want me to confess I don't know? I've thought of so many things; they don't fit. Or I don't fit *them*. Ever since I was a youngster I've scribbled, written. Trash, trash! I've tried to write verse. It's worthless; isn't even third rate verse. I've talked, lectured. That isn't any good, either. Sometimes I think there ain't *anything*; but as soon as I quit thinking, go outdoors, see people, sights, and mingle with persons, I begin to live again; feel red blooded, inexpressibly excited, eager; have the strong sense that I am meant for all this and that something good, something positive will yet come out of it all, be expressed by me or through me, it doesn't matter which. Maybe in action; maybe in both words and action blending. Which, which?

Grant Overton.

And when? How long must I wait—watch, absorb, steep, ripen?"

Love is the key to his life and art. When he found no final personal satisfaction, he turned the current of power into poetry. He had loved in youth—and lost. Lincoln had a similar experience, and the two great Americans are represented as talking it over together.

"You are thinking," said Lincoln, "that in some such fashion, with the aid of some such friendly example, you might have been able to construct a happiness similar to mine. . . . Walt, it is an every day sort of happiness, a 'working' happiness, as one would say; 'practicable' is the phrase I think employed on the stage to describe such sets and scene shifts as are not merely background but can be used—a door you can walk through, a door that is not merely painted on the backdrop, is a 'practicable' door. . . . In a world where a good deal is simply painted on the backdrop I found a practicable door. That is my married happiness."

Walt never found that kind. Perhaps he could not and do the work he had to do.

How Funny It Is, Also, How Sad!

THE CIRCLE. By W. Somerset Maugham. George H. Doran Company.

WHEN a man has said so many true and tragic, brilliant and bitter things so perfectly as Mr. Maugham has in this play, which is both a literary masterpiece and a Broadway moneymaker, it would seem a rather futile gesture to add any secondary comment. But Maugham stirs one to self-expression, futile or not; the magic "Circle" must be reviewed.

It is difficult to say anything about this play which will entirely disregard its presentation in the theatre. Having read it before its production, one smiles and says: "How clever." Witnessing a performance, one laughs a good deal and says: "How funny." Upon rereading the book, however, the lines are no longer black upon white, but subtly tinged with the color of human voices; one is more than a little inclined to weep and say: "How sad!"

"The Circle" is a very sad play, with all its gayety. Who in all its witty, epigrammatic company is not desperately tragic? Poor, silly Lady Kitty! Well, her unhappiness has been widely exploited. And Porteous? "A grumpy, sodden old fellow with false teeth." Buffoons are always sad. Clive, the cynical, with his whiplash speeches and his feline voice. He speaks for himself, too.

"You think," says Clive in a moment of honesty, "I'm a cruel, cynical old man. Why, when I think of what she was, if I didn't laugh at what she has become I should cry."

The foolish young lovers, so brave and sure of their love, so heedless of the ancient ruin before their youthful eyes! Elizabeth and Teddie, they make one sad. Yet there is something about them that gives one confidence they will make a go of it anyhow. They face life squarely, they fool neither other people nor themselves. No subterfuges for them, no notes speared on pincushions, no dramatic poses of any sort. Simply, they love each other and have the courage to deal a blow for that love. The greatest courage of all, that which is strong enough to hurt some one else to get what one needs. How many lives have been wrecked because that courage was not there!

Yes, they are sad, all of them. But how glamourously sad, how picturesquely tragic. The things one can imagine about them all—Kitty's past, Elizabeth's future! The things Hughie might have been and the things Teddie will be. The wickednesses of Clive.

There remains only Arnold, the earnest minded, purposeful young husband, who married to have a home and also because he didn't "want to be bothered with sex and all that sort of thing." His is the real tragedy, because his is the nothingness. No glamour about Arnold, nothing picturesque about him. When his father was deserted he resigned from Parliament and set about becoming an authority on pretty women under twenty-five. But Arnold is different. He will resign from Parliament and become an authority on Old English furniture.

There is a feeling that Arnold will not suffer very long. His pain will soon be over because he will lose contact with life. Could anything be more dreadful than that? Oh, how greatly Arnold's tragedy overshadows all the others!

Humor From Hamsun

DREAMERS. Translated from the Norwegian of Knut Hamsun by W. W. Worster. Alfred A. Knopf.

THIS book should dispose, once for all, of those critics who say that Hamsun is lacking in humor. It is written in a vein of the most delightfully intimate comedy and satire without a trace of bitterness. Hamsun knows these people with their little quirks and drolleries, and he lets you feel in every line that he is one of them. They are people that he understands and loves well, these fishermen of Norway. He knows their little vainnesses and idiosyncrasies, their simplicity, and their rugged strength, and he tells of them in a playful and kindly humorous way.

The plot of "Dreamers" is very slight, almost a musical comedy plot, but it serves as a frame upon which to spin the delightful *hamsunsk* comment on things, and for the play of life and character in a Norwegian fishing village. Hamsun always has a wild, Quixotic fellow about to keep things interesting. This time it is Telegraph-Rolandsen, roisterer, lovemaker and inventor. Rolandsen is a wild, fantastical dreamer, a moth flying around the flames of youth. But he is a pretty shrewd sort of a moth in his way, and knows that it is well to prepare for winter and the dark days. The Quixotic dreamer becomes a serious business man, and is in a fair way to bring his dreams to realization as the book ends.

The characterization is excellent. Trader Mack, the great man of the place, the small town's glass of fashion, who feels that his prestige is waning because money has been stolen from him; the pastor and his lady, the sailors, the fishermen and the village Romeos and Juliets—all are delightful in their way. As always in Hamsun one gets wonderful description, done very simply. This, for instance, gives the very feel of the short, brilliant Norwegian summer: "The nights were too brilliant and full of sun. It was the weather for dreams; for little fluttering quests of the heart. Young folks walked the roads by night, singing and waving branches of willow. And from every rocky islet came the calling of birds."

And this for autumn: "Autumn was setting in; the wind rushing through the woods, the sea yellow and cold, and a great awakening of stars in the sky."

There is nothing dour or darkly Scandinavian about "Dreamers." It is like a play of sunlight about a mountain top. HOLGER CAHILL.

Corelli's World of Mystery

THE SECRET POWER. By Marie Corelli. Doubleday, Page & Co.

LIKE Hall Caine, Miss Corelli takes her responsibility to her large and faithful public seriously. She doesn't turn out a book a year. The new story took time to write and it takes time to read—no skipping, mind! Every character is earnestly, seriously presented. This author heeds the Bible's warning against the "idle word." There are accents on all her syllables.

It is a deep satisfaction to meet people who know their own mind so positively as do Miss Corelli's heroines and villains.

"All for Love and the World Well Lost" might have been the motto of the beautiful Spanish Manelia, who loves Roger Seaton. There are no "ifs" in her frank admission to Seaton of her love for him and desire to be his woman.

Roger, a poor but clever scientist, replies with equal candor: "You tell me you would be my woman—and I know you mean it. You would be my slave—you mean that, too. But you would want me to love you! Manella, there is no such thing as love!—not in this world! There is animal attraction—the magnetism of the male for the female, the female for the male—the magnetism that pulls the opposite sexes together in order to keep this planet supplied with an ever new crop of fools—but love! No, Manella! There is no such thing! I quite believe that it is the natural instinct of the female to select her mate, but though the rule may hold good in the forest world it doesn't always work among the human herd. Man considers that he has the right of selection—quite a mistake of his, I'm sure, for he has no real sense of beauty or fitness, and generally selects most vilely. All the same he is an obstinate brute, and sticks to his brutish ideas as a snail sticks to its shell. *I* am an obstinate brute!—I am absolutely convinced that I have the right to choose my own woman, if I want one—which I don't—or if ever I do want one—which I never shall!"

Morgana Royal, the wealthy young American, a "fey" woman, of Scotch parents, is the type of woman, according to Seaton, who wants something newer than sex attraction and family life. "A husband would bore her to extinction—the care of children would send her into a lunatic asylum!" She is one of the emancipated women. And of course she was loved by the Marchese Giulio Rivardi, a typical Latin, a descendant of the Cæsars. He did not indulge in such futility unwarned, for Don Aloysius, a priest of the church, had spoken these mystic words:

"You would not believe me if I told you that sometimes in this wonderful world of ours beings are born who are neither man nor woman, and who partake of a nature that is not so much human as elemental and ethereal—or might one not almost say, atmospheric? That is, though generated of flesh and blood, they are not altogether flesh and blood, but possess other untested and unproved essences mingled in their composition, of which as yet we can form no idea."

Morgana's plans of the "White Eagle" take form. She has before her an airship like a great bird, with wings which move, but no machine, the elements being utilized for motive power! And it flies, far and near. There is only one who knows the secret of its flight. A woman, and she, Morgana Royal, will not divulge it!

To a gathering of people at her *palazzo*, Don Aloysius says: "Let me tell you of certain people who once 'went with the time'—and decided to stop *en route*, and are still at the stopping place. Perhaps some of you who travel far and often have heard of the Brazen City? Those who visit the East know of it. And some say they have seen a glimpse of its shining towers and cupolas in the far distance. However this may be, tradition declares that it exists, and that it was founded by St. John, the 'Beloved Disciple.' You will recall that when Our Lord was asked when and how John should die, He answered: 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee'? So, as we read, the rumor went forth that John was the one Disciple for whom there should be no death. And now—to go on with the legend—it is believed by many that deep in the as yet unexplored depths of the deserts of Egypt—miles and miles over rolling sand waves which once formed the bed of a vast ocean—there stands a great city whose roofs and towers are seemingly of brass; a city barricaded and built in by walls of brass and guarded by gates of brass. Here dwells a race apart—a race of beautiful human creatures who have discovered the secret of perpetual youth and immortality on this earth. They have seen the centuries come and go—the flight of time touches them not—they only await the day when the whole world will be free to them—that 'world to come' which is not made for the 'many' but for the 'few.' All the discoveries of our modern science are known to them—our inventions are their common everyday appliances—on the wings of air and rays of light they hear and know all that goes on in every country. Our wars and politics are no more to them than the wars and politics of ants in ant hills; they have passed beyond all trivialities such as these. They have discovered the secret of life's true enjoyment and—they enjoy!"

There are many more wonders in the volume. But why should we tell you about the airship trip to the heart of the deserts of Egypts? Of the earthquake in California and the airship's trip there? Of the outcome of Manella's love for Seaton? Of the talks between the priest and Morgana? Of the final trip of the airship? No! That is for you to read, to wonder over, to peep at the last pages of the book in an endeavor to learn the ultimate climax of the lives of those five beings before you have read half way through.

Who Killed 'Snow' Gregory?

[illegible] O' JUDGMENT. By Edgar Wal[illegible]. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co.

[illegible]CK O' JUDGMENT! Poor old Jack o' Judgment! How he frightened us! How he thrilled [illegible]. How he kept us in suspense and [illegible]sing! And when we learned all [illegible]t him, who he was, and his object [illegible]such a disguise, we forgave him; [illegible] sympathized with him. And when [illegible]e crucial moment came, when the motive for his disguise had been fulfilled and Col. Dan Boundary had died at his hands and he himself was about to follow on his heels, Jack o' Judgment told his story to his young subordinate. "But you must give me your word you will never tell," he asked his friend, and Stafford promised.

Like Stafford, who promised to remain silent, we have promised those concerned not to disclose the secret either, and if we did, we could never—would never—ask to be forgiven.

It all started with the finding of a young man called "Snow" Gregory in a gutter, and he was dead before the policeman on duty in Waterloo road who heard the shots came upon the scene. His associates had named him "Snow" Gregory because he was a dope fiend, and cocaine is occasionally referred to as snow by its votaries. When they searched his clothes they found nothing except a little tin box of white powder, which proved to be cocaine, and a playing card—the jack of clubs. But try as they might the police could not discover why and at whose hands Gregory had died. After the jury had returned a verdict of "wilful murder, against some person or persons unknown," the case was placed in the records, where it seemed likely to remain with the rest of those never to be solved mysteries that confront the police.

Three months after the murder of "Snow" Gregory, Col. Dan Boundary received a letter. He found within a soiled and stained playing card, the knave of clubs. He saw writing on the margin of the card, and, twisting it sideways, read "Jack o' Judgment." Nothing more.

Boundary, by the way, was what we might call a law abiding thief—a man who transacted business in such a fashion that the police could never bring him to justice. He never failed to cover his tracks. He purchased mills, estates, and other businesses far below their net value and always at the figure laid down by himself.

But after Dan Boundary received the mysterious card and others that followed simultaneously he began to quake with fear. Jack o' Judgment was even daring enough to visit him in his home. Then piece by piece you are led into many mysterious doings. You learn a great deal. And you puzzle and wonder who and what kind of a person this Jack o' Judgment is. But you keep on reading. Is Jack o' Judgment Hanson? you ask yourself. Is it Maisie White who is playing the part? Is it Lollie Marsh? Is it Stafford King, the detective? But no, in the end you learn, as we have, you've been on the wrong tack all the time.

Edgar Wallace has written a good story. It has kept you in mental motion until the mystery is cleared. You have been held like a pendulum and swung back and forth through space and in place of the usual "tick-tock! tick-tock!" you hear: "Who is he? Who is he?" Suspense is an awful thing! But then it sells books!

JAMES A. QUIGNEY.

Sardine Seller's Son Sovereign's Shadow

THE VILLA OF THE PEACOCK. By Richard Dehan. George H. Doran Company.

THE seven short stories in this volume have widely varied themes. From the first, and the longest story, the book gains its name. This deals with that freak of nature which occasionally is met—two boys, the young royalty and the shopkeeper's heir, who are as alike as two peas. Until the King was grown and married, the mixing up of the sardine merchant's son, Don Enrique, with the monarch was looked upon as nothing very serious. But when the King married and Don Enrique acquired a bad reputation, then it had to be stopped. Don Enrique was exiled. In Paris he led a gay life, but there a jesting remark of the King of Donda regarding him threw Don Enrique into anarchy. From then on we deal with anarchists who plot to destroy the King and place his double on the throne. The solution is very amusing.

"Dorotea et Cie," the third story, is by far the best. Its scenes and climax are weird and dramatic, while imagination runs riot through its pages. Next to that we enjoyed "The Silver Birch," in which a young girl embodies the secret of charm and solves the mystery of grace, "calm as a forest lake, stately as a silver pheasant, graceful as a silver birch, the loveliest and most graceful thing of all."

"The Formula of Brantin" is of the invention of a drug which cures drug and alcoholic fiends and makes them immune from the effects of their particular failing. "The Slug's Courtship" is of rural England—a love story in which a man and a woman find the mates they have sought, and "The Extraordinary Adventures of an Automobile" is far from extraordinary as a story.

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Brand Whitlock, former Ambassador to Belgium and author of "Belgium" (Appleton), has recently had conferred on him the title of "Honorary Member of the Grand Serment des Arbalatriers de Saint Georges," a dignity of ancient tradition, as Brussels papers point out.

Officer Murphy Heard a Shot!

THE SHERIDAN ROAD MYSTERY. By Paul and Mabel Thorne. Dodd, Mead & Co.

ON the fifteenth line of the text of this story the reader is awakened from the somnolent mood created by the early morning atmosphere of the scene in Sheridan road with the italicized sentence: *"Just then Policeman Murphy heard a shot!"*

From that moment there is nothing sleepy about this criminal tale of the Thornes. The reader gets action all the way: From Marsh the mysterious; from Detective Sergeant Dave Morgan of the Chicago police force; from the counterfeiter and murderer who is the chief figure in the mystery. And if Jane Atwood does not furnish positive action in one way she does in another by the tender effect she has on Marsh.

But this is primarily a novel of action and mystery, and in those two aims it is an unqualified success. The Thornes evidently decided they were going to be original in the denouement of their plot, if not in its opening scene, and this they achieved by having the body of the murdered man found in a place that Poe might have envied.